Anti-Mexican Violence, Race, and the Myth of Color-Blindness

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ABSTRACT

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Race and color-blindness have been examined in Mexican American and Latina/o Studies scholarship to explain the United States' use of power through white supremacy to enact anti-Mexican violence. Anglo Americans have utilized laws, rhetorical strategies, and the manipulation of whiteness to yield fear and xenophobia, exacerbating negative stereotypes of Mexicans and Mexican Americans (e.g., "illegal," gang members, drug dealers, rapists, criminals, dirty, diseased, mongrel). These attitudes continue to intensify under neoliberal, center, and right-wing U.S. politics and policing to characterize communities of color and immigrants as the "problem." Neoliberal and liberal politics that use the concept of "color-blindness" do equal harm by erasing histories and ongoing experiences of white supremacy and colonial domination. The purpose of this study is to highlight how the formation of race, which is intrinsically tied to class and gender, is utilized as a mechanism for anti-Mexican violence in historical and contemporary contexts. I also intend to draw connections between this historical legacy and the contemporary period through a discussion about color-blindness and the dangers of white individualism. An examination of white supremacy, and its manifestation throughout

U.S. institutions, is critical to understanding these issues because it allows us to critique the systems of power that continue to dominate the bodies of people of color. Racial hierarchies will continue to be reinforced if whiteness dominates U.S. society, academia, and the political apparatus. If we continue to ignore this history and the ongoing subjection, anti-Mexican violence – a critical facet of nation building – will continue unchallenged.

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INTRODUCTION

The walk-up window of Keno Café had not been used for years (Figure 1). Although the restaurant was renovated, sold, and placed under new management for several decades, the window continued to haunt a silent history in Weslaco, Texas. In the Juan Crow days of the Southwest United States, Mexicans were not allowed inside establishments open to white patrons. This challenging time in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, which left many Mexicans and Mexican Americans defending the land that once belonged to their ancestors, sheds light on a problematic history for residents like my grandfather. Each time we would eat at the Keno Café when I was young, my grandfather would retell the memories of being forced to order and wait for his food at the walk-up window outside, because Anglo whites didn't allow people like him inside. I have since learned that my grandfather's experiences were part of a larger strategy to police and control Mexicans in the region, which relegated them to segregationist policies evidenced through the divisive geography of the town to this day.

The place I had called home was once divided by its train tracks, with Mexiquito to the north and Anglo American neighborhoods to the south. According to my grandfather, Mexicans were to adhere to strict community rules on a day-to-day basis in order to avoid consequences from white residents. For example, Mexicans were allowed to cross the tracks from sunrise to sunset, typically to work in Anglo homes, but "a Mexican-American who was found south of the railway after dark aroused suspicion. He was questioned immediately by the police and hustled across the line, either by the officer, or, less graciously, by the more rowdy of the south-siders" (Rubel 44). Anthropologist Arthur Rubel describes this divide between the Mexican side and the Anglo side of the train-tracks, and the subsequent violence experienced by Mexicans in Weslaco

in his 1966 study *Across the Tracks: Mexican-Americans in a Texas City*. This history continues to be felt by Mexican communities in Texas today, in conjunction with traumas and injustices perpetrated by police, the state, and white supremacy. I dwell on the reality of these familial traumas, especially as they are connected to larger topics within the Mexican American and Latina/o Studies discipline; thus, my interest in this work has evolved out of trying to understand how these histories took place and continue to impact our communities.

This study aims to examine the significance of anti-Mexican violence expressed through white domination, political rhetoric, and extrajudicial control in Texas. Further, it works to critique systems of capitalism and white supremacy, which are intrinsically tied to the control of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States. In this study, I argue that anti-Mexican violence is the result of a state apparatus that functions to control and dominate racialized groups, through white supremacy, in order to uphold a racial hierarchy that protects whites, whiteness, and capitalism. As the U.S. evolves and politicians, organizations, and scholarship aim to elevate the experience and mobility of Mexican American communities, there is a historical reality that gets white-washed under the guise of progress through color-blindness and "unity." For decades, as marginalized groups have fought for rights, status, and self-determination in the national discourse, our community remains subject to this type of erasure. Thus, an examination of how we got here and how we should proceed, and resist, is a driving dynamism throughout this study.

This argument will be realized through four chapters. Chapter one will describe the history of white domination in the United States, beginning with the formation of race, the ambiguity of race for Mexican *ranchero* elite, and how Mexican Americans navigate whiteness in the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexico War. I discuss how claims to whiteness have been used to

write laws and policies, while shaping how and when Mexicans are identified or recognized by the state. Chapter two will delve into Mexican labor in relation to capitalism, nativism, and policing. The history of Mexican belonging in the United States has always depended on labor and exploitation. I consider how Mexican labor in the U.S. American imagination is maintained through the Mexican body being utilized as a source of labor. Mexican labor is delimited as both easy to control and violently controlled through capitalism, nativism, and law enforcement. Chapter three discusses race, gender, and border violence in the Trump era; including examinations of the "Remain in Mexico" policy, separation of families, and impunity for U.S. Border Patrol officers who enact violence on non-U.S. citizens at the border. I draw comparisons to historical racialization and gendering of Mexicans in the U.S. with contemporary examples that were documented throughout the Trump administration. Finally, chapter four puts history, the present, and where we must move from here into perspective by critiquing color-blind narratives that leads to increased white dominance. I contend that in order to dismantle systems and institutions of white supremacy, we must hold white American individualism accountable and call for increased responsibility among our white counterparts to do the work necessary to produce *real* change for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and communities of color.

Note on Terminology

While white supremacy, white nationalism, and white domination have similar definitions, I distinguish them here for a more accurate understanding of this discussion. For me, white supremacy describes a falsely constructed notion that white people possess a racial superiority, allowing for a superior-inferior dichotomy between other races –particularly Black people. White nationalism, as described by the Southern Poverty Law Center, is the belief that

the "white identity should be the organizing principle of the countries that make up Western civilization" (SPLC). In the United States, this belief calls for a reorganization of the demographic structure in order to protect and uphold white, racial hegemony. Finally, white domination, as described by sociologists Matthew Desmond and Mustafa Emirbayer can be explained by dissecting the term "domination:"

> The word "domination" reminds us that institutional racism is a type of power that encompasses the *symbolic power* to classify one group of people as "normal" and other groups of people as "abnormal"; the *political power* to withhold basic rights from people of color and marshal the full power of the state to enforce segregation and inequality; the *social power* to deny people of color full inclusion or membership in associational life; and the *economic power* that privileges Whites in terms of job placement, advancement, wealth, and property accumulation. (345)

This is the most crucial definition for the purposes of this discussion. Although white supremacy and nationalism are key parts of understanding how racism continues, "white domination" is pervasive across U.S. society. It touches every part of our lives, so much so that we sometimes do not even realize it. White domination may be the most dangerous of the three because of its ostensibly invisible nature – it is systemic, systematic, and institutional – bringing the most destruction because it can go unacknowledged. Throughout this project, I will use each term carefully, utilizing these definitions as foundations to my analysis.

I am also reluctant to use the term "extremist" when referring to white nationalists and supremacists because it masks the systemic forms of white domination that are byproducts of colonialism, slavery, immigration control, and racialized police surveillance. Further, "extremist" moves the blame from the U.S. colonial state to a small group of people, or in some cases one person, undermining the processes of ongoing subjection and domination by the United States through institutionalized mechanisms.

I use the word violence throughout this project in reference to multiple forms including physical, societal/institutional, and expressive or rhetorical harms on communities of color. For me, physical violence includes extrajudicial and state sanctioned killings (e.g., lynching, police brutality, capital punishment); societal/institutional violence includes land dispossession, assimilation, segregation, border enforcement, surveillance, laws and policies, labor regimes, capitalism, etc.; and expressive or rhetorical violence includes political rhetoric, derogatory labels, news, social media, and every day microaggressions enacted on communities of color. Violence is an intrinsic part of the U.S. colonial project and white supremacy; thus, they have been successful in dominating due to the multiple forms and uses of violence throughout history and the present day.

For this project, anti-Mexican violence utilizes all of these multiple forms and definitions of violence. It also incorporates the violence of forgetting and erasure, which is a result of decades of manufacturing white-washed histories that leave out racially motivated state sanctioned killings, vigilantism, torture, hanging, and intimidation upon Mexican American communities. As Monica Muñoz Martinez asserts, recognizing and understanding this violence allows us to "expose the linked practices of racial violence that created a long-lasting, pervasive atmosphere of terror. Mobs lynched ethnic Mexicans with impunity, state and local police colluded with vigilantes, and the militarization of the border fed anti-Mexican sentiment" (9). Thus, anti-Mexican violence is a culmination of the multiplicity of racial violence that transcends any particular moment in history. It reveals a specific, targeted use of expressions, tactics, and punishment that continues to be felt today.

To understand "race" as it applies to Mexican Americans, it is important to also consider "racial formation" and "racialization." I use Michal Omi and Howard Winant's definitions for a more coherent analysis. According to Omi and Winant, "*race is a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies*" (110). Racial formation is defined "as *the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed*" (109). Last, racialization is "*the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group*" (111). Throughout this project, I refer to each of these terms within the context of Omi and Winant's definitions. This is especially true for "racialization" because mainstream identifications of ethnic Mexicans and Mexican Americans tend to obscure the complexity of race and how racialization, through processes of racial formation, come to dominate how bodies are located, controlled, and punished.

Applying Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's framework of "color-blindness," I aim to make connections between legacies of racialization, white-washing of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and people of color struggles in the current political moment, and holding Anglo Americans accountable for perpetuating violent systems of domination. Bonilla-Silva explains color-blindness through four frames: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism (54). While this project does not investigate the expressions of color-blindness utilizing these four frames, it is important that we understand Bonilla-Silva's framework for our own clarification.

First, abstract liberalism refers to the ideas related to "equal opportunity" and "individualism" (56). It builds on the notion that all people of color are guaranteed the same rights, protections, and opportunities as whites, and that any form of institutional or systemic

practices of racism were effectively removed via the civil rights movement. Second, naturalization "allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences" (56). This frame deals with the way whites organize their movements and placements in society. For example, white people associating predominantly with other white people, living in the same communities, or doing the same activities – it is better understood by statements like "'people gravitate toward likeness'" or "'*they* (racial minorities) do it too'" (56). Third, cultural racism is the frame that engages in arguments based on culture to explain the plight of minorities in society (56). It ignores historical and systemic implications of white supremacy and shifts the blame from inherent biological inferiority to a cultural one. This is evidenced through statements like "Mexicans do not care about their education" or "Black people are lazy." Fourth, minimization of racism "suggests discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities' life chances" (57). It manifests through statements like "things are better for minorities now than the past" or "why do you always have to make it about race?" The goal of this frame is to deflect the experiences of people of color by arguing that "not everything is about race." Further, it posits that in order for something to be "racist," it needs to be in-your-face, overt, or utilize slurs.

Bonilla-Silva teaches us through these frames that color-blindness is more complex than simply "I don't see color." Rather, it is a deeply methodical way of reasoning and maintaining white superiority as the status quo. Color-blindness is part of the dangers of white domination because it contextualizes the experiences of people of color through the frame of whiteness as the norm. It removes blame from white people and forces everyone else to deal with the consequences in a "race-neutral" way.

Note on Methodology

The development of the argument and analysis of this qualitive study is possible through the utilization of primary and secondary sources. The latter reflects a literature review, composed of foundational texts in Critical Race Theory, Mexican American and Latina/o Studies, and related scholarship on border enforcement, policing, legal history, capitalism, and color-blindness. Primary sources include news stories, and Tweets from social media. These sources serve as supporting evidence to topics examined throughout this study.

Disclaimer

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the United States' historical trajectory that leads to anti-Mexican violence. However, I acknowledge that it would be naïve for the material presented here to attempt to explain the experience of *all* Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S. as a monolith. With this in mind, the goal of this project is to describe how white domination and supremacy, coupled with racial capitalism, gender hierarchy, and border violence contribute to a history in which those of Mexican origin, heritage, and/or ancestry have ended up in fewer positions of power compared to whites, and are subject to harsher socioeconomic outcomes. Further, I hope to use this medium as a way to critique arbitrary systems of race, racialization, and the destruction that capitalism brings to populations in the United States as a means of social control and upholding a racial structure.

I use the term "Latinx" throughout this study, but it is important to offer a caveat to the use of this term. As Geography scholars like Alan P. Marcus have argued, panethnic labels such as "Latina/o/x" ostensibly "convey and project a monolithic population and monolithic continent," in regard to "Latin America" (171). The term has developed a connotation in popular

discourse, academia, and media that signifies an inherent Spanish-speaking population that shares similar cultures, identities, and geographies. Thus, it has the power to ignore the complex histories of Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean – which include many non-Spanish speaking countries – and the Afro/Black and Indigenous identities that have been subject to legacies of colonialism. While the objective of the study is to focus on Mexicans and Mexican Americans, certain sections refer to "Latinx" individuals as they are discussed in popular discourse and the media. However, I acknowledge and recognize the complications of terminology and hope that future scholarship can continue to work toward dismantling these tendencies to name/label while further rendering certain identities to invisibility and silence.

Last, I would like to point out the challenges of the relations between whiteness and Mexicanidad, in the context of the United States. Undoubtedly, claiming whiteness or assimilation is a response to the degree of anti-Mexican violence experienced by Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S., including psychological, socioeconomic, and political traumas that have a lasting effect on how we see ourselves belonging in the nation state. As an Ethnic Studies scholar, I believe that this history must continue to be told and retold so that we can resist the effects of white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism.

CHAPTER ONE

WHITE DOMINATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Introduction

On August 12, 2017, a group of white nationalists hosted a "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia to protest plans to remove a Confederate statue of Robert E. Lee (Katz). The group was met with counter-protestors, where violence soon erupted and resulted in one death and many others injured after one white nationalist drove his car into the crowd of counter-protestors. In a news conference following the events, President Donald Trump repeatedly called for the need to "see the facts" before making a judgement and concluding that "there were very fine people on both sides" (*Politico*). Later in the news conference, Trump claimed that race relations in the United States would improve because of his administration and tearing down Confederate statues was akin to taking down statues of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, because they too were slave owners.

Trump's logic exemplifies the history of white supremacy in the United States, and his ability to draw an equivalence between the Founding Fathers and Confederate leaders is an ironic admittance of this history. Why do we idolize the feats of one group of white men but not another? It is naïve to separate both groups of white men, because the former inherently produced inequality through the creation of U.S. law, while the latter upheld and defended it through innumerable violent expressions – most notably through war. Although the Founding Fathers may not have envisioned the separation of the Union and a civil war nearly 85 years after the Declaration of Independence, they wrote a system which produced a historical trajectory that would inevitably lead to this division. Such irony exposes the vulnerability of the birth of this

nation: it was born out of Indigenous genocide and built on the backs of enslaved Black people; thus, the state itself, regardless of how we pit unionists versus confederates, was birthed through white supremacy. In this chapter, I will briefly discuss the history of white domination and the production of race to instill racial hierarchy in the United States. This will be realized through a discussion about laws and policies that constructed race, how race functioned within the U.S. political apparatus, where Mexican elite fit within the racial order, and the relation between Mexican Americans and whiteness.

Racial Formation

The United States legal system has constructed race in a subjective way that established inferior individuals to maintain white domination, especially as race applied to national origin, naturalization, and citizenship. Race and constitutional law scholar Ian Haney López argues that the arbitrary process of prioritizing, separating, and excluding people based on both visible and invisible biological characteristics served as the means for developing the superior "white" group. As legal scholar Ariela Gross explains, colonial Europeans needed a way to enforce and "justify the enslavement of Africans for their labor" and keep non-slaveholding whites from finding solidarity with those who were physically non-white, namely enslaved Africans and Indigenous folks (Gross 16). This process dominated much of the legal system following the inception of the nation and continued after the Civil War through a series of racial prerequisite cases that came before U.S. courts. These cases served as determinant legal decisions and precedent for categorizing who was "white" and "non-white."

In order to legally defend distinctions between groups of people, lawmakers "created a body of law that established 'white' and 'black' as two separate legal categories" (16). These

would become the first racial categories that we know today and provided a contrasting line between the superior whites and inferior Black people. Although Africans were still enslaved when these categories were first developed, over time, race became "central to people's identities and a crucial factor in determining their social lives, their economic opportunities, and the way they were perceived by others" (17). In other words, race controlled who would and would not succeed in the colonies and eventual U.S nation-state. Race would serve as a justification for decades of slavery and the exclusion of those who did not fit the "white" category.

But who was white? While this was often a subjective understanding, it is clear that whiteness was intrinsically tied to class, allowing certain groups to transgress the white-Black binary. Indeed, Mexicans and Mexican Americans occupied an ambiguous position within the binary: they were neither Black nor sufficiently white. As Tomás Almaguer explains, "Those whose class position and ostensible European ancestry placed them at the top of the hierarchy during the Mexican period, the 'gente de razón,' were reluctantly viewed as 'white' by the Anglo Americans," referring to Mexican rancheros, as I will discuss later in this chapter (Almaguer 55). Thus, wealthy, privileged, and capitalist whites knew that such associations depended on a system of racial categorization that needed to center on class status, constructing social standing and national belonging in ambiguous terms. They also depended on non-slaveholding whites to support the idea that "citizenship was racially defined – effectively allying them with wealthy planters and industrialists," in turn using whiteness to create a sense of belonging to a superior race (Gross 47). While non-slaveholding whites were situated in a lower socioeconomic class, as long as they embraced their whiteness, they could still distinguish themselves from the "inferior" Black and Indigenous people. Thus, employing concepts like "manifest destiny" helped to promote these notions of racial domination and superiority because they allowed whites to "rest

easier if the sufferings of other races could be blamed on racial weakness rather on the whites' relentless search for wealth and power" (Horsman 210).

Despite the possibility for "gente de razón" to transgress certain racial hierarchies that subjugated the lives of Black, Indigenous, and mestizo Mexicans, racialization would remain part of Anglo Americans' strategy for controlling land, resources, and labor. As the next section will highlight, exceptions for some elite Mexicans to the racial order did occur; however, this exception only functioned if white people were the sole beneficiaries of production and wealth. These associations were fluid, as the U.S.-Mexico War and its aftermath would demonstrate, and represented an opportunity for whites to remain in command of racial ordering.

Exception to the Racial Order? Mexican Elite in the Northern Mexican Territory

While a discussion on white domination in the United States is foundational to understanding how anti-Mexican violence continues today, it would be irresponsible to erase the history of whiteness and Mexicanidad in the pre- and post-U.S. takeover of the American southwest. Thus, it is important to recognize the intersectionality of this history in the latter 19th century. To be sure, the ambiguity of Mexicanidad, through the guise of the colonizer-colonized dichotomy, presented the possibility for light-skin Mexicans to transgress the racial order. They often made claims to the colonizer, or European-Spanish ancestry, while darker-skinned Mexicans were relegated to the colonized position as a result of *mestizaje* and indigeneity.

Following Mexican independence from Spain in 1821, large swaths of land in the Northern territory of Mexico (including California and New Mexico) were encouraged for development through the Mexican government's Colonization Act of 1824. During this period, until American occupation in 1846, Mexican land-owning elites known as "rancheros"

dominated the territory. They operated the land through the enslavement of Native American populations in California and maintained power through the subjection of other Mexican classes, particularly smaller landowning rancheros, skilled laborers, mestizos, artisans, and some local officials. While their power in the region did not last long, the elite rancheros benefited from their proximity to whiteness, which became a dominant narrative that shaped how Mexicanidad was to be perceived by European-American whites.

As whites from the north east U.S. migrated to the north western Mexican territory, in accordance with manifest destiny, they encountered enslaved Native Americans and an economic system based on servitude labor. For the white Americans, this system showed that Mexican elite, "whose backwardness reflected their having poor personal habits and collective deficiencies such as laziness or a penchant for extravagances," needed to be remedied by immediate white Anglo control (Almaguer 52). These sentiments helped to defend the United States movement, occupation, and colonization of the Mexican territory, and many Anglo Americans took it as their duty to take control of the region. Following the U.S.-Mexico War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, Mexicans in the former Mexican territory were given citizenship, allowing Mexican ranchero elite to use their European ancestry as a justification for belonging to the white race. Although white Anglo Americans conceded the right to citizenship, they continued the narrative that Mexican elites "were neither truly 'white' in the northern European or Anglo-Saxon sense of the term, nor were they simply 'uncivilized' Indians. Terms such as 'semicivilized' or semibarbarian'" prevailed (54). The fear that surrounded debates following the war was that the newly acquired territory would contain too many of these "semicivilized" and "barbaric" populations. As Laura Gómez explains, "the goal of ending the war became entangled with the goal of getting the most land from Mexico with the smallest

number of Mexicans" (42). Thus, the elite ranchero class would eventually meet their end to claim over the land, as I will discuss in Chapter 2. The fight was not over however, as the new Mexican American population would continue to appeal their *de facto* whiteness and assert the need for *de jure* recognition in the 20th century.

Race and the U.S. Political Apparatus

One of the first cases on racial identity decided by the Supreme Court was *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, a Hindu immigrant seeking naturalized citizenship. Thind argued that the Court should abandon its effort to categorize people racially, because anthropologically "there [was] no clearly defined 'white' race" (Gross 211). However, the Court rejected the claim and denied Thind citizenship based on his inability to assimilate into whiteness. Following Thind's case, a scientific movement erupted and fought for authority in the courtroom "concerned with classifying human beings according to a great 'Chain of Being'" and to further establish the white order that Thind's case questioned (223).

The eugenics movement was perhaps the most effective in convincing politicians that something needed to be done about the threat to white supremacy. It argued for tighter immigration restrictions in order to keep the U.S. pure and prevent racial mixing from occurring. In order to prevent other races from tainting the white nation, eugenicists also advocated for "the passage of stringent segregation and sterilization laws aimed at blacks, Indians and Mexicans" (Gross 224). They were particularly concerned that racial mixing and reproduction would lead to offspring that "would be weaker, less intelligent, and less able to reproduce than their parents," enhancing the notion that any drop of blood that was not white would lead to a degenerate

population (224). According to eugenicists, Mexico was a prime example of racial mixing gone wrong,

> vice president of the Immigration Restriction League, Madison Grant, argued 'the absorption of the blood of the original Spanish conquerors by the native Indian population has produced the racial mixture which we call Mexican, and which is now engaged in demonstrating its incapacity for self-government

presumably referring to the Mexican Revolution (225). Mexicans were the product of racial mixture, a process that needed to be stopped, according to Grant, "to avoid 'sweeping the [United States] toward a racial abyss," that threatened the power and purity of the white race (225). Law served as the medium that would suppress such a threat from destabilizing white rule, which was the foundation of U.S. citizenship. The Federal Immigration and Naturalization Act would make "formal citizenship an issue of racial identity by limiting naturalization to 'free white persons (since 1790) and people of 'African nativity' (since 1866)" (212). Any person who sought naturalization needed to fall into either of these racial categories.

It was clear that Europeans who were not from England, France, Spain, or the Netherlands would have an easier time claiming whiteness, since they were geographic neighbors to those original American colonizers. Although Italians, Poles, Germans, and eastern Europeans who were Jewish or Catholic experienced discrimination and racialization for their geographical and religious associations, they were never deprived of citizenship because "Europeans were 'white on arrival'" (Gross 213). By contrast, Mexican immigrants, because of their racial ambiguity and so-called mixing, experienced a different process upon arrival.

Instead of close association to the colonizer, Mexican immigrants "were nearer to peons…degraded in status in order to provide cheap plantation-style labor, not unlike the freed African American slaves in the post-Civil War Southeast" (Gross 213). Mexicans were subjected to harsh scrutiny for their mixed blood, especially by Congressional lawmakers. One example

was the formation of the United States Joint Immigration Commission, also known as the Dillingham Commission. Established in 1907, the objective of the Dillingham Commission was to conduct and produce reports for Congress that named racialized groups in order to recommend ways to prevent them from existing within the borders of the nation. Led by eugenicists, "[t]he Dillingham Commission's recommendations eventually led to the adoption of stringent immigration restriction legislation in 1921 [The Emergency Quota Act, also known as the Emergency Immigration Act of 1921] and 1924 [The Immigration Act of 1924], establishing immigration quotas based on national origins that were designed to keep the racial composition of the United States" as white as possible (224). The legislation resulted in a massive deportation scheme involving Mexican nationals, and even some Mexican Americans, when there was no work in agriculture during the Great Depression. These processes of removal zeroed in on the fact that "Mexicans…truly were less white than the Europeans," even if their genetic composition had Spanish blood in it. As it would later play out in the courts, race transitioned from identifying one person to categorizing entire groups of people.

Although Mexicans did not fit the "common sense" of race, that is to be perceived as a white person without anyone knowing your genetic identity, they would be granted a second-class type of citizenship. This was due to the legal association with the "Caucasian" race set by the courts, which said that groups could claim whiteness so long as they were not African "negroes" or Chinese or Japanese "Mongolians" (Gross 236). Despite the legality of Mexicans in the United States, in conjunction with their association to whiteness, the courts decisions would not function as the be-all-end-all of their racial discrimination. White supremacy was relentless and would push for decades of segregation through loopholes to keep Mexicans and Mexican Americans from achieving full protected status as "Caucasian."

Mexican Americans and Whiteness

After Pete Hernandez was tried and convicted of murder, the United States Supreme Court, in the 1954 case *Hernandez v. Texas*, struck down his "conviction because Mexican Americans had been systematically excluded from the Texas jury that tried him" (Gross 253). Although the Court did not define whether or not Mexican Americans were legally white, it denied Texas' claim that "a Mexican American defendant suffered from no discrimination because he was white and the jurors in his case were white too" (253). This claim demonstrates how Mexican Americans were treated by whites in relation to the rights associated with citizenship, in this case the right to serve on a jury.

There was a sense of formal citizenship, but nothing beyond the title. Although they were labeled "Caucasian" they were part of a separate class that was distinct from the dominant true white one. Hernandez's lawyers put it in better terms: "'about the only time that so-called Mexicans – many of them Texans for seven generations – are covered with the Caucasian cloak is when the use of that protective mantle serves the ends of those who would shamelessly deny to this large segment of the Texas population the fundamental right to serve as…jurors'" (Gross 253). Whites only placed Mexican Americans in their protected category to deny that discrimination was occurring. In addition, Mexican Americans were economically poor, most working as farm laborers, which gave whites more justification to treat them as an inferior race. Gross says, "Mexican Americans, like blacks, faced a more thoroughgoing exclusion from full social and political citizenship, and were the victims of violent, racist prejudice on both economic and social levels" (254). While institutional discrimination through racially charged Jim Crow laws were a shared experience for Mexican Americans and African Americans, their

legal status was significantly different. This did not mean that Mexican Americans were necessarily treated any better, but "their exclusion was de facto, in practice, rather than de jure, by law" (254). This begs the question: how much did the state get away with discrimination toward Mexican Americans, since they were technically part of a protected racial class? Exclusion had to be targeted a different way, and whites were not quick to give up their fight for supremacy.

As mentioned earlier, Mexican Americans were entitled to formal citizenship following the U.S.-Mexico War through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This technical, legal belonging meant that there needed to be a more complex role in keeping them from full social and political citizenship. The state, and by extension white Anglos, tried every method of exclusion. They aimed to solidify the notion of Mexican Americans as an inferior racialized population, arguing that Mexicans' "dirtiness, lack of innate ability, and inferior intelligence" constituted their "unfitness for jury service or school attendance" (Gross 254). White Anglos even went a step further in order to dodge the racial discrimination claims by using language to explain cultural inferiority. Instead of excluding "Mexicans" they moved to bar "Spanish speakers" as a way to promote nativist ideas of citizenship. Thus, racial discrimination was a claim that could not be pursued by Mexican Americans, despite exclusion, because according to the state they were technically white.

While this was a fact for most Mexican immigrants and existing Mexican Americans, there were different attitudes that applied to white Mexicans versus brown Mexicans – yet another hierarchy that prevailed throughout the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship before the Mexican Revolution of 1910. During Díaz's regime, "a racial hierarchy predominated in which people of higher class [usually land owning] claimed 'Spanish blood,' regardless of their actual ancestry or

color" (Gross 256). This demonstrated a direct reflection of the behavior of wealthy, land owning whites in the United States, who also considered white Mexican immigrants as "Spanish" to distinguish their status, as was the case of elite rancheros in the former Northern Mexican territory. As a result, "U.S. border officials made their own racial determinations, placing some Mexicans in the category 'Spanish race' and others – usually darker-skinned people – in the category 'Mexican race'" (257). Regardless of what the law said, white Anglo Americans would stop at nothing to limit who could and could not claim citizenship and the rights that came with that identification. For nativists who opposed unrestricted Mexican immigration, this meant developing policies that would target, police, and exclude Mexicans.

Through the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924, immigrants became a scapegoat for division, with nativist politicians shifting their attention to undocumented Mexican immigrants. In the 1930s, Americans pushed for stricter Jim Crow laws toward Mexican Americans by forcing over half a million to "repatriate to Mexico, some voluntarily, but the majority under great duress" (Gross 267). Of course, those who remained in the United States were subject to a second-class type of citizenship, which moved to make it known that they were unwelcomed, undesired, and unfit for assimilation.

Texas, as well as California and other parts of the Southwest border region, became the location of *de facto* exclusion. This was because there was no legal pathway of discrimination since Mexican Americans were technically white. For this reason, "in the 1930s and 1940s…most Mexican American children attended separate schools; indeed by 1930, 90 percent of all south Texas schools were segregated…Mexican Americans were discriminated against in jury selection and in voting; in many places they were shut out of public facilities such as swimming pools, theaters, and restaurants, or segregated into the 'colored' section together with

African Americans" (Gross 267). A fear of race mixing, as pointed out by eugenicists earlier, led white Anglo Texans to support segregated schools. Since state statutes were not in place to legally segregate, school districts interpreted the existing statute to include Mexican Americans in the "Indian" category. Furthermore, "[t]he first efforts to include Mexicans in the U.S. Census, in 1930, counted them among 'people of other races,' with 'Mexican' being one of the other races" (268). The state went so far as to ban Black-Mexican marriages, using anti-miscegenation to keep the races from mixing and creating solidarity out of a fear of a potential uprising against upper-class whites.

The governing elite needed to enforce a racial hierarchy, by measuring these groups' proximity to whiteness, that showed Mexicans were racially superior to Black people – as they previously did with Black and Indigenous peoples at the birth of racial categories. This us-versus-them binary was further articulated when the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) became involved with racialization. Due to strong opposition to categorize Mexicans as "people of other races" by LULAC, "the 1940 census categorized Mexicans as white unless 'definitely Indian or some other race other than white'" (Gross 268). It was not until 1980 that Mexican Americans and other Spanish-descendent groups were put under the general term "Hispanic" following the "race" question on the census form, which demonstrated the state's way of identifying racially ambiguous groups of people in order to separate them from the Caucasian racial category. LULAC also aimed to distance Mexican Americans from African Americans in order to make civil rights claims to whiteness. However, in a strategic move to dismiss suits, the courts began to reject claims that were based on racial discrimination.

As litigation grew prior to the Civil Rights Movement, Mexican American groups and organizations found themselves in the courtroom arguing racial discrimination in school and

public facility segregation, as well as social and political participation. The state countered this litigation by differentiating what counted as racial discrimination and made clear that Mexican Americans were being targeted for language and culture differences, which did not fall in the category of racial discrimination. In order to uphold segregation and exclusion "[f]or the purposes of anti-discrimination law, 'race' meant 'skin color,' and only discrimination based explicitly and intentionally on color counted as racial discrimination" (Gross 277). This meant that Mexican Americans could continue to be segregated and excluded for language and cultural purposes. Ultimately, "the consistent refusal of state courts and the Supreme Court to acknowledge its central insight that race is produced by practices of subordination, and that racial discrimination can be disguised as discrimination on the basis of culture or language" was the real setback for Mexican Americans during that era (292). Nonetheless, children continued to be segregated, citizens were deprived of their right to jury service, and Mexican Americans racial identity remained fluid, cementing their status as inferior.

Conclusion

Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States have been and continue to be subjected to harsh state violence. This violence is part of the ongoing white domination that was born at the inception of this country. It is important to recognize that if we continue to ignore this history, racial hierarchy and white supremacy will never be dismantled. As this chapter demonstrates, the relation between Mexicanidad and whiteness is complicated; yet, it shows how the arbitrary process of racialization works to serve the needs of white Americans. The following chapter delves into the challenges as it relates to capitalism and control. Xenophobic attitudes toward non-whites, non-English speakers, and immigrants continues to be a visible rhetorical

tactic by right-wing politicians to weaponize racist fears among the dominant white group. For example, we see this danger through the election of Donald Trump and what riles up his base; however, we should remain hopeful for a brighter political and social future of the United States as Mexican Americans, Afro-Latinxs, and Indigenous communities continue to rise up against injustice and build movements toward equality.

CHAPTER TWO

MEXICAN LABOR IN THE U.S. AMERICAN IMAGINATION

Introduction

Mexican and Mexican American communities have a long, painful history of disposability in the United States. Even in the midst of a global pandemic, laborers from these communities, whether in the food, hotel, retail, or agricultural industry, continue to experience state violence built on histories of white domination and control. Mexicans in the U.S. have complicated relations to where they fit in the racial hierarchy and have the potential to dodge certain racially and nationally restrictive immigration policies; however, in Kelly Lytle Hernández's *Migra!*, they are nonetheless subjected to a racialized understanding of belonging in the U.S. national identity. In this chapter, I argue that this ambiguity of racialization and belonging for Mexicans in the U.S. serves to control Mexican American labor in order to maximize capital. This is justified through racializing practices, exemplified through the term "racial capitalism."

In order to protect white capitalist interests, the agribusiness and capitalists have worked to keep Mexican labor in a subordinate position in several ways. According to Lytle Hernández, because Mexicans needed to exist in the U.S. as a means of capitalist production, the Mexican identity became racially ambiguous within the Black/white racial dichotomy in order to manipulate how and why they belonged in this country. Second, Mexican labor has been characterized as easy to control as a way to appease nativists. And third, in an attempt to quash any fears that Mexicans would transgress the class hierarchy, immigration policy (e.g., creation of Border Patrol) became a tactic of instilling white power and giving working-class whites a

role in controlling Mexicans. This chapter discusses how Mexicans have been historically used as a tool of capitalism (i.e., labor to maximize capital), the ways in which their labor was controlled, how violence (e.g., extrajudicial, state sanctioned, and dispossession) was enacted as control, and the role law enforcement played in counteracting class solidarity between Mexican laborers and working-class whites.

A Means of Capitalist Production

In order to serve the needs of the capitalist agribusinessmen, Mexicans were viewed outside of the Black nor white racial binary. Racial ambiguity allowed agribusiness to promote Mexicans as "non-threatening" to the status quo and justify their employment. As the agricultural industry grew in the Southwest United States in the early years of the twentieth century, with the transformation of the region through irrigation projects and the railroad, coupled with white farmers seizing land from established Mexican ranchers, agribusiness depended on a cheap labor source to grow their empire. While previous attempts to secure labor from Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino workers failed because they fought back against growers, and Black settlement in the region unwelcome, agribusinessmen turned to Mexican workers who "they argued, were quiet, diligent, and docile, and therefore ideal farm workers" (Lytle Hernández 24).

As policies barred Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos from entering the United States, Mexican workers presented white agribusinessmen with a solid, reliable labor force. In addition, the ambiguity of the Mexican identity in the U.S. racial hierarchy was promising to an already charged xenophobic and racist climate. Agribusiness agreed that Mexicans were not white, but at least they "presented a superior alternative of racial inferiors to labor in the fields of the American southwest" without being Black (Lytle Hernández 31). The in-betweenness to the

racial order that Mexicans were relegated to ensure that they could be exploitable solely as a means of capitalist production. This form of racial capitalism also guaranteed that agribusinessmen would have a large low-wage labor network, while asserting that these laborers were merely cogs in the machine who were only in the U.S. for nothing more "'except our dollars and our work'" (31). To appease nativist concerns with prolonged Mexican settlement, agribusiness defended white supremacist ideologies. They argued that any population that could not fit into the white racial category was meant only to produce profit. Such arguments made it easier for agribusiness to justify exempting Mexicans from immigration restrictions, because they represented the thriving U.S. capitalist agricultural venture in the rapidly developing southwest. Thus, keeping Mexicans in a regulated, ambiguous racial limbo made it easy for them to settle and serve in areas where Black laborers were unwanted, at the same time proposing no immediate threat to whites.

Easy to Control

The key strategy for agribusiness to reduce white nativists anxieties was to prove that Mexicans were easy to control. For nativists worried about Mexicans settling in their communities, agribusiness worked to establish a Mexican identity that was better than "the 'negro problem'" (Lytle Hernández 31). For example, Mexicans would not pose the threat to white womanhood as Fred Bixby described. Further, Mexican immigrants represented a transitory population that were "both temporary and innately marginal" (31). Growers argued that they would not assimilate or make settlements like other ethnic and racial minorities. In Texas, agribusinessmen promised nativists that they would handle the Mexican population and that any opposition to Mexican immigration would bring ruin to the booming agricultural

industry. While these strategies somewhat alleviated nativist fears, agribusinessmen took it a step further and instilled domination through political, cultural and social life in the borderland region. To ensure that Mexicans only operated from the field to their home and back, and kept away from white society, "highly racialized practices of social segregation, political repression, and community violence accompanied the patterns of economic exploitation" (29). These practices functioned to bring Mexicans into the U.S. imaginary, not as human beings, but simply as labor. Labor that was exploitable, deportable, temporary, and eventually disposable.

Clear associations with constructing the Mexican identity in relation to labor was intrinsic to social control outside of the agricultural fields. For agribusiness, this meant keeping Mexicans, and their children, from being educated, through segregated schooling institutions, because it ensured the generational cycle of field labor would be passed down to offspring. Not only would this benefit wealthy white agribusinessmen, it appeased lower-class whites who benefited from the inequity (with the sense of socioeconomic mobility, so long as Mexicans could not transgress class through education). As David Montejano explains, "Educating Mexicans also raised danger that Mexicans might seek 'social equality' – a possibility…feared by lower-class Anglos" (191). Further, educating the laboring Mexican population would disrupt the robust labor apparatus created by white farm owners because it threatened the established dominant order by which capitalist whites could demand labor and control, regulate, and suppress Mexican wages. The disposability and sub-humanity inflicted on the Mexican identity appealed to white nativists while strengthening the agribusiness argument that the Mexican "impact upon America would only be measured in dollars and sweat" (Lytle Hernández 31). This dynamic of power did not stop many Mexicans from attempting to break free of these oppressive socioeconomic structures;

however, if they would not live up to the supposed "docile" nature as workers, whites were apt to inflict violence as a mechanism of control.

Violence as Control

In conjunction with the rhetoric employed to control Mexicans and their labor, extrajudicial violence also played an important role in reinforcing hierarchy. As I discussed earlier, violent acts of killing were not out of bounds with helping white settlers achieve their goals, be that racial domination, capital domination, or both. Ken Gonzales-Day argues that violence such as public lynching of Mexicans "were guided by anti-immigration sentiments, the fear of miscegenation, a deep frustration with the judicial system, or in combination with white supremacy" (3). Acts of extrajudicial lynching served the purpose of all white parties involved, agribusiness elite or working-class, because it forced Mexicans to live, obey, and fear the consequences of social transgressions (e.g., race and class). As Joy James argues, "The prevalence of torture and mutilation established lynching as a terrorist campaign to control an ethnic people subjugated as an inferior race" (30). James' discussion about lynching as a public spectacle and mechanism of policing coincides with the notion that if Mexicans would not accept their position in the hierarchy, whites, of all classes, would make sure they did. This type of surveillance, public prosecution, and visual marker of the white rage associated with social transgressions was a fundamental part of controlling the Mexican population. Further, methods of consequence through extrajudicial violence would be used to redistribute capital, social positions, and wealth in favor of white settlers.

As discussed in the previous chapter, elite Mexicans in California often experienced a different sense of control by whites, due to their class standing and claim to European ancestry.

Yet, this class difference did little to elevate the position of Mexicans in the Texas agricultural industry; rather, land displacement was the primary mechanism of robbing established Mexican ranchers as white settlers moved into the region following the U.S.-Mexico War. As David Montejano describes, "not only did the new American law fail to protect the Mexicans but it also was used as the major instrument of their dispossession" (52). With new market conditions brought by capitalist whites, the acquisition, and sometimes stealing, of land played an important role in this dispossession.

Mexican farmers lacked the financial capital to maintain their land in the new market. Montejano points to the way this lack of capital shaped class changes among Texas Mexicans from 1850-1900, a period of rapid agricultural expansion by white settlers:

> At mid-century, the rural Mexican population was equally divided in thirds among ranch-farm owners (34%), skilled laborers (29%), and manual laborers (34%). By the turn of the century, the two top tiers had shrunk – ranch-farm owners comprised 16 percent of the Texas Mexican population, skilled laborers 12 percent – and the bottom tier of manual laborers had expanded, compromising 67 percent, or two of every three adult Mexicans. In contrast, the segment of the Anglo-American population that showed the greatest increase in the nineteenth century was the ranch-farm-owning class, from 2 percent in 1859 to 31 percent by 1900. (73)

What Montejano points to is a deliberate reaction of the white capitalist settlers' successful attempt to dominate and control Mexicans, as to destroy their claim to capital and rob them of a chance of upward mobility. These statistical realities were not only traumatic for both established Mexican ranchers and non-landowning laborers, they also created a troubling historical trajectory, which are evidenced through labor control, extrajudicial violence, and social inequality through segregationist efforts that continue to have haunting effects on the community today.

Whereas new white landowners created capital possibilities for their descendants, the same cannot be said for once land-owning Mexicans. Montejano drives the point home:

> For the Mexican population, displacement of landowning classes had devastating and irreversible effects. The landed elite and the struggling *rancheros* were not replaced by their descendants or by other Mexicans. Thus, market development for the Mexican community signified a collapsing of the internal class structure. With few exceptions, the propertied classes of the Mexican settlements did not reproduce themselves. (73-74)

In addition, mechanisms of state violence were often used to ensure that landowning Mexicans knew their place in the hierarchy. As Monica Muñoz-Martinez discusses, the murders of Jesus Bazán and Antonio Longoria, the former a longtime property owner and the latter an elected official in South Texas, show how "Citizenship, political positions, and social prominence did not offer ethnic Mexicans protection from violence" (80). Regardless of who the perpetrators were, anti-Mexican violence was a pervasive part of the white settler agenda in Texas. Further, this strategy of killing prominent, influential, landowning men was a deliberate method through which whites could rob Mexicans by way of the patriarchy. "'You don't buy from the husband, you buy from the widow' became a popular saying. It gestured to the widespread practice of executing landowning men to force the sale of land by their widows" (Muñoz-Martinez 102). Violence was often a means through which white supremacy and domination could be accomplished, and it was executed through cowardly ways in which white men, who were supposed to represent the "apex" of civilization, did not have the guts to complete transactions. As is consistent with their history, slaughter and stealing is the only way of accumulating "real" capital.

Law Enforcement and Preventing Class Solidarity

As Mexican immigration was unrestricted in the early 20th century, the establishment and operation of the U.S. Border Patrol was another mechanism of control and policing. For working-class whites, the Border Patrol served as a means of economic survival and social uplift in the middle of an agribusiness dominated region. If working-class and non-land-owning whites were threatened by the influx of Mexican labor, the least they could do was leverage their racial power over Mexican workers.

While poor whites were less interested in protecting the interests of large landholders, it would be impossible to build class solidarity with Mexicans because they were still at odds under the racial hierarchy. It also worked in the interests of nativists who were adamantly opposed to Mexican immigration and worked in favor of rich agribusinessmen who nonetheless wanted to show they could control the Mexican population. As Lytle Hernández argues, "The Border Patrol's turn toward policing Mexicans…was a matter of community, manhood, whiteness, authority, class, respect, belonging, brotherhood, and violence in the greater Texas-Mexico borderlands" (41). Rather than pitting poor whites against elite whites, this policing effort played an important role in consolidating whiteness versus the non-white Mexican identity. The creation of the Border Patrol and the power of their policing supported notions of white supremacy while also functioning to defend the idea that Mexicans were purely labor. As one south Texas labor union official stated, "'I hope they never let another Mexican come to the United States,'" while another explained, "'The country would be a whole lot better off for the white laboring man'" (Lytle Hernández 41). Thus, it was up to white men to instill their dominance, whether through capitalist exploitation, nativist rhetoric, or policing, to reinforce Mexican existence as only to serve the economic interests of the state.

Conclusion

The histories of controlling, policing, and relegating Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States to violence continues to be felt today. The issues of racialization, labor exploitation, and borderland surveillance and enforcement as presented by Lytle Hernández seem like a century in the past; however, popular representations of Mexican and Latinx identities today still uphold sentiments of disposability. In the national imaginary, our identity is still seen as a labor force that maintains the interests of capitalism and agribusiness, is subject to nativist rhetoric that wants us to "go back" to where we came from and threatened by state sanctioned police and border violence. In order to fight this state apparatus and systematic control, we must continue to resist all forms of white domination.

CHAPTER THREE

RACE, GENDER, AND BORDER VIOLENCE IN THE TRUMP ERA

Introduction

Donald Trump's rise to President of the United States came with dreams to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border made of steel and human bones. He promised his supporters that he would "Make America Great Again" by sealing the state from undesirable people, a nod to the historical legacy of xenophobia and exclusion in the United States that apparently once made it great. On October 1, 2019, *The New York Times* published an article detailing some of President Trump's ideas for border security. The article stated that Trump "often talked about fortifying a border wall with a water-filled trench, stocked with snakes or alligators…[h]e wanted the wall electrified, with spikes on top that could pierce human flesh. After publicly suggesting that soldiers shoot migrants if they threw rocks, the president backed off when his staff told him that was illegal. But later in a meeting, aides recalled, he suggested that they shoot migrants in the legs to slow them down" (Shear and Davis). Trump's medieval white supremacist fantasy indicates a present fear and anti-immigrant sentiment that continues to be projected onto non-white, non-citizen bodies – a rallying cry that helped him get elected in the 2016 presidential election.

An article by Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington in 2004 argued that an influx of the Mexican and other Spanish-speaking populations presented a real danger to the heart of "Anglo-Protestant culture" in the United States. According to Huntington, "the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America's traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the

fertility rates of these immigrants compared to…white American natives" (32). That same year, the Republican controlled Congress passed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act, with measures that increased border surveillance, the number of full-time Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, and expanded immigrant-detention bed space. This same panic is evident today with anti-immigrant tropes that have been amplified by Trump's election, and his popularity among white supremacists. Trump rallies have become sites of reverence for those who seem to praise his imagination, adding to the spike in public expressions of bigotry toward non-white communities and helped codify racialized and gendered immigration enforcement policies.

The systemic inequality and continual reformation of Mexican, Mexican American, and Afro-Latinx identities in the United States are a result of laws and policies that work to suppress anyone who is not white. Identification is important to this community today; however, the history of exploitation through racism, the exclusion of certain genders and sexualities, and xenophobia are part of the state constructed identities and systems of power that this country still depends on. In this chapter, I argue that anti-Mexican violence is perpetuated through the formation, surveillance, and regulation of race and gender based on white domination at and within U.S. geopolitical borders. Intersectional approaches to immigration scholarship through critical ethnic studies perspectives have provided transformational ways of understanding how the United States constructs citizenship, surveils immigrant populations, and regulates its national borders according to racialized and gendered structures. This chapter seeks to contribute to this body of ethnic studies, including Mexican American and Latina/o Studies scholarship, by discussing the effects of racial violence on Mexicans Mexican Americans in the U.S., examining

instances of racialized gender policing perpetuated by anti-immigrant politics, and the violence at the border that have turned the imagination to a material harm.

Racializing Mexicans in the U.S.

On August 3, 2019 at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, a gunman shot and killed 23 people and injured dozens in a vicious domestic terrorism attack (NBC News). The shooter, Patrick Crusius, drove nearly 10 hours from North Texas to El Paso to carry out what he called "the fight to reclaim my country from destruction" brought by "the Hispanic invasion of Texas" (Crusius). These details were outlined in a manifesto titled "The Inconvenient Truth" posted by Crusius minutes before the shooting began. Crusius' four-page declaration echoes the idea perpetrated by many white nationalists and right-wing politicians that claim Mexicans and Latinxs are *invading* the United States (@realDonaldTrump).

Crusius' motives for attack come at a time when the United States is experiencing an active rise in white nationalist hate groups. According to a report by Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), which tracks white nationalists and white supremacists, the U.S. has seen "a 55 percent increase since 2017, when Donald Trump's campaign energized white nationalists who saw him as an avatar of their grievances and their anxiety over the country's demographic changes" (SPLC 6). The report describes 10 other similar attacks in the U.S. during 2019 and the white nationalist mass shooting that killed 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. While mainstream media points to Trump as one of the reasons why we are seeing these statistics, it is naïve to think that white nationalism, supremacy, and domination no longer hold weight in normative nationalist visions of the United States, especially prior to Trump's election in 2016. Further, the possibilities for the national image of the U.S. to shift toward a

more progressive, revolutionary, utopian future must include the recognition that statist methods of reconciliation (i.e., institutional reform via electoral politics) are complicated given the foundation of the racist U.S colonial state, as I have outlined throughout this study.

Patrick Crusius detailed his motives and methods for the El Paso, Texas Walmart shooting throughout his manifesto. He depicted racialized political rhetoric about immigration and "Hispanics," popularized by right-wing scholars like Harvard's Samuel P. Huntington and reiterated by Donald Trump. Crusius admits that the "Hispanic community was not my target before I read The Great Replacement," a theory coined by French author Renaud Camus (Crusius). "The Great Replacement" is a conspiratorial white genocide theory that blames the decrease in the white French and European population on the influx of non-white migrants to Europe and the tolerance of these migrants that has followed through the bounds of immigration. According to Camus, "immigration has become a misnomer for what it is: it is more akin to an invasion, a migratory tsunami, a submerging wave of ethnic substitution" (Camus 23).

For white nationalists across Europe and the United States, the only way to combat this so-called invasion is to resist it through any means necessary, including violent acts of terror like the Walmart shooting. This is why the election of Trump, a racist xenophobe, is a victory for white nationalists and supremacists: he represents a political and cultural answer to the great replacement, a point that won him the 2016 election. Camus argues that "with Donald Trump America began to realise that it was itself just as menaced by the frightfull Great Remplacement [sic] as Europe is. Hence the shouts of *You Will Not Replace Us* at Charlottesville and elsewhere" – *You Will Not Replace Us!* is the title of the work I am quoting from by Camus (176). As Trump's rhetoric of an immigrant invasion amplified after he took office (including policies like "Zero-Tolerance," which led to the separation of migrant families at the border, and

"Remain in Mexico"), attacks on racialized communities should not come as a surprise. Rather, they highlight the popularity of racism today, a phenomenon that most white Americans still have trouble grasping, especially elected leaders who deny that things like systemic racism exist within U.S. institutions (Al Jazeera).

To understand how whiteness has constructed the racialization of Mexicans and Latinxs in the U.S, you have to understand historical contexts of white supremacy, or as I have referred to it throughout this study: white domination. I use "domination" rather than "supremacy" here to indicate the deeper systemic and institutional racial hierarchy embedded within our society. The intersectionality of race/ethnicity, culture, gender, and class play an important role in shaping the attitudes of white U.S. citizens toward Mexican and Latinx immigrants. In a contemporary sense, we can look again to Samuel Huntington's "The Hispanic Challenge" in which the threat of a Latinx, Mexican in particular, invasion is presented. Fears of a reconquest, "Spanglish as a second language," and a permeable citizenship that transgresses borders are at the forefront of his anxiety. Further, this supposed problem presents a national identity risk that challenges the foundation of white domination: white majority. According to Huntington the only way to fix this issue is through an assertion of the white-normative U.S. American identity. Huntington theorizes:

> A plausible reaction to the demographic changes underway in the United States could be the rise of an anti-Hispanic, anti-black, and anti-immigrant movement composed largely of white, working- and middle-class males, protesting their job losses to immigrants and foreign countries, the perversion of their culture, and the displacement of their language. Such a movement can be labeled "white nativism."

Huntington's argument suggests that "white nativism" has not existed in the United States since the first colonists founded Jamestown in 1607. It further erases the decades of Indigenous genocide, African enslavement, Asian exclusion, forced Mexican repatriation – just to name a

few – that were at the hands of white supremacy ideology and based on a fictional "white nativism." Huntington's race-conscious scholarship, as Ian Haney López asserts, "uncritically advocate[s] race-consciousness as a step toward the elaboration of a positive White racial identity, and thus disregard the extent to which a positive White identity already exists, and further, the extent to which such a positive identity may require inferior minority identities as tropes of hierarchical difference" (López 15).

Historically, such political moves of white nativism were reflected through popular anti-immigrant and eugenics campaigns in the early 20th century, which imagined that Mexicans were the product of a racial mixing gone wrong and needed to be stopped "to avoid 'sweeping the [United States] toward a racial abyss," an apparent danger to the purity of the white race (Gross 225). White U.S. Americans and politicians, in conjunction with eugenicists, also moved to construct Mexican bodies as undesirable, claiming their "dirtiness, lack of innate ability, and inferior intelligence" justified processes of surveillance and discrimination (225). We can look to an example of the U.S. government literally cleaning Mexican bodies at the El Paso-Juárez, Mexico border through the "gasoline baths" in 1917 in response to the United States' concern with the spread of the typhus disease. Historian and cultural activist David Dorado Romo discuses that over 127,000 Mexicans "were required to strip completely, turn in their clothes and baggage to be steam-dried and fumigated with hydrocyanic acid and stand naked before a customs inspector who would check his or her "hairy parts"—the scalp, armpits, chest, pubic area—for lice. Those found to have lice would be required to shave their head and body hair with clippers and bathe with kerosene and vinegar" (Ranjani Chakraborty). Since Mexicans were perceived to be inherently "dirty" and "diseased" they were subjected to racialized state violence that aimed to cleanse their bodies of an invisible contamination predicated on race and culture.

Further, the hydrocyanic acid used to fumigate Mexican immigrants' clothing, popularly used as a pesticide known as Zyklon B during that time, would become the same chemical used in Nazi German extermination camps in the 1940s. Looking at a journal by German Scientist Gerhard Peters, the man who pushed to use Zyklon B in concentration camps, reveals photographs from the El Paso delousing chambers as examples for German disinfection. Romo contends that although "Zyklon B…was used on the border not to intentionally kill Mexican border crossers…the history of something like the Holocaust doesn't take place in a vacuum" (Ranjani Chakraborty). Instances of white nativism and nationalism transgress time, place, and national borders – representing a commonality between the desire to exterminate undesirable bodies in an effort to materialize an exclusionary white supremacist fantasy.

Public bigoted expressions, such as the El Paso Walmart shooting, toward racialized Brown bodies, particularly Mexicans and Latinx immigrants, who are being accused of "invading" the U.S. perpetuates historical trajectories of racial violence and the Latino Threat Narrative. Such propaganda spewed by Republican politicians and the Trump Administration reveal a white panic that continues to plague the United States, with an increased political pressure to keep non-white, non-citizen bodies out of the U.S. geopolitical borders and "send back" those who do not belong. Huntington's prophecy manifested through the messiah-figure of Donald Trump, who promises to deliver Americans from evil "invaders," signifies a fear that rests on scapegoating immigrants. The rhetoric almost a century ago, through policies like the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924 which authorized the formation of U.S. Border Patrol, is reminiscent of what the United States has seen recently with the Trump Administration, as politicians "whose constituents were very unlikely to be in competition with Mexican workers were reluctant to abandon nativist rhetoric because of its power to unite whites of disparate

economic situations against a common scapegoat" (Gross 267). Today, right-wing political discourse reinvigorates white nativism's relentless logic restating that Mexicans, and by extension Latinxs, are unwelcomed, undesired, and unfit for assimilation. On June 16, 2015 when Trump announced his candidacy for president, he uttered the famous haunting words that evoke the histories of anti-Mexican violence:

> When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. (Katie Reilly)

Racialization remains a powerful tool that supports white domination, especially as it applies to national origin, belonging, and citizenship because it provides a basis for fearmongering against the supposed threat of a browning America.

Fertile Latinas and the "Bad 'Hombres'"

White domination can only continue if invasive non-white populations, who are seen as reproductively uncontrollable, can be contained and prevented from entering the United States. Current white anxieties concerned with invasion and uncontrollable reproduction by non-white bodies rearticulates the possibilities for gender to morph over time in order to control who is worthy of admittance into the country. These anxieties are grounded in racial and xenophobic exclusionary mechanisms that utilize border surveillance and policing to keep destructive populations out. This is important for looking at the current fears of Mexicans, Latinxs, and other non-white groups as imminent threats to the foundations of the U.S. American identity – which is grounded in white homogeneity and heteronormativity.

The present anti-Mexican panic occurring at and within the U.S. border strengthens the desire to control sexuality, always racialized and gendered, of certain immigrant populations. As

Eithne Luibhéid argues, "[t]he policing of immigrant women on the basis of sexuality also enabled the discursive production of exclusionary forms of nationalism that took concrete shape in immigration laws and procedures, but extended well beyond the border to produce particular visions of U.S. nation and citizenry" (Luibhéid xi). Because the imagined racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual fabric of this country depends on whiteness, immigration control became a local for producing sexual identities that ought to be excluded. In addition, "they considered what would happen if these various immigrant groups gave birth to significant numbers of children or had sexual relations or intermarried with 'Americans,'" which might ultimately disrupt the continuation of white domination (xiii). Rather than addressing and mitigating inequalities and violence perpetrated by imperialist mechanisms, the United States continues to surveil, inspect, and turn away immigrants at the border, reiterating the racialized and gendered systems that regulate who is admitted into the country. Such regulation can be seen on immigrant women's bodies, which rely on white heteronormative visions of family and nation building, further justifying state surveillance and militarization at and within the geopolitical borders of the United States.

We can look to a similar instance, historically, of gender and sexuality management through anti-Japanese attitudes in the early 20th century. In 1921, journalist V.S. McClatchy prepared a pamphlet for the U.S. State Department entitled "'Japanese Immigration and Colonization,'" which "reflected and further fueled the exclusionists' angry charges about the supposed dangers presented to California and the nation by Japanese wives' childbearing" upon immigrating to the United States (Luibhéid 63). This anti-Japanese strategy played on fears of an invasive population coming to destroy white domination and supremacy. The terror that this brought to white U.S. Americans initiated gender and sexuality violence that aimed to racially

subordinate Japanese women versus white women. Whites became frightened by the idea that "[t]hrough immigration, the Japanese could acquire land, and through population-increase from childbirth by immigrants they could begin to crowd out white Americans" (64). This same hysteria is evident today with anti-immigrant tropes that have been amplified by Trump's election and revitalized a dangerous public sentiment of violence toward non-white communities. Racist, gendered, and sexualized hate also comes in the reinvigorated call to end birthright citizenship.

Anti-birthright citizenship has been a contentious topic for years, with growing support from right-wing politicians in an attempt to solidify a national identity that privileges whites. In the 1990s, California Republican Governor Pete Wilson "called for a federal constitutional amendment that would prevent the American-born children of undocumented persons from receiving birthright citizenship" (López 30). This was related to other legislation his administration supported such as California Proposition 187 which sought to prohibit undocumented immigrants from using non-emergency health care, public education, and other services in California.

Xenophobic attitudes toward non-whites, non-English speakers, and immigrants is becoming more visible in rhetorical strategies by Republicans to unify racist fears among the dominant white group. Trump has utilized these strategies to catalyze a movement of hate and exclusion, propelling the fight to end birthright citizenship. In an October 2018 interview with Axios, Trump argued that he could end birthright citizenship with an Executive order, bypassing the 14th amendment's guarantee of citizenship for those born in the United States. He said, "[n]ow how ridiculous, we're the only country in the world where a person comes in, has a baby, and the baby is essentially a citizen of the United States for 85 years with all of those benefits.

It's ridiculous, it's ridiculous and it has to end" (@axios). Trump never acted on his so-called Executive order to end birthright citizenship; yet, self-proclaimed pro-life Republicans continue their support for racist, xenophobic policies and proposals that threaten the lives of non-U.S. citizens and their unborn children.

"Bad hombres," Trump's reference to immigrant men coming through the U.S.-Mexico border, as violent threats to U.S. American citizens builds on a larger history of non-white men as dangerous, reiterating the domination of patriarchal white supremacy. In 2008, Tom Tancredo, a Republican presidential candidate, released a political ad called "Consequences," showing photos of gang members he purported to be Latino immigrant men. The ad claims that these men are "pushing drugs, raping kids, destroying lives" as a result of politicians who believe in "open borders" (CampaignAdCentral). Predating Trump's famous words about Mexicans, Tancredo renders himself as an American defender from these vicious, alien criminal men.

In a similar way, Republican Florida Governor Ron DeSantis ran an ad during the 2018 governor race that played on white heteronormative tropes to make him look like a protector of the white familial unit. The ad opens with his pregnant wife, Casey DeSantis, evoking ideas of the innocent white housewife, praising the skills of her husband as a father, and reconstructing the ideal U.S. American nuclear family. In comparison, Tancredo's ad begins with disturbing photos of slain bodies and a voiceover proclaiming, "mothers killed, children executed, the tactics of vicious Central American gangs now on U.S. soil" suggesting the dangers posed by non-white men and their inability to foster a family (CampaignAdCentral). These two ads reiterate how the rhetoric Republican politicians use rely on racist, gendered tropes of non-white men as violent, criminal threats to white U.S. society and white men's role to protect the familial unit, hence the nation.

In October 2018, Trump tweeted that "[m]any Gang Members and some very bad people are mixed into the Caravan heading to our Southern Border. Please go back, you will not be admitted into the United States unless you go through the legal process. This is an invasion of our Country and our Military is waiting for you" (@realDonaldTrump). Trump's warnings strengthen anti-immigrant tropes that legitimize hatred toward non-white communities inciting violence as a mechanism to control, destroy, and even kill the apparent infestation.

These exclusionist political views, which support U.S. imperialism in the name of national security and U.S. corporate interests, ignore that U.S. policies create the issues that force Mexicans and Latinxs to leave their home country in the first place. Thus, as Luibhéid argues, "the relations of power and inequality at the border cannot be separated from inequitable global relations that structure migration patterns or from social hierarchies" still present in the United States (Luibhéid xxiii). Alarmist claims of an invasion that ignores the relationship between cause (U.S. foreign intervention) and effect (increased immigration), contribute to the way politics constructs non-whites, thereby solidifying a normative gendered white power system of domination.

Border Violence & Prosecutorial Immigration Enforcement

Various factors contribute to the rise in criminalizing unauthorized migrants, including new legislation that arises out of the politics related to racialization and xenophobia. Patrisia Macías-Rojas focuses on how this legislation changed the legal scheme of immigration and fast-tracked the process of apprehension to prison for unauthorized migrants. This section is broken into three parts: I) the political pressures to secure United States borders are seen through prosecutorial immigration enforcement, II) Trump's "Remain in Mexico" policy, and III) the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Hernandez v. Mesa*. These contemporary political moves are

reminiscent of historical policies and legal decisions that helped construct race to naturalize and codify white domination and subject vulnerable populations to violence.

I. Prosecutorial Immigration Enforcement

Macías-Rojas describes the rise in incarceration seen in the criminal justice system due to increased prosecutorial immigration enforcement at the border. This rise in incarceration comes out of the United States government shifting the responsibility of who dictates criminalization. For example, "frontline Border Patrol agents have been given tremendous power to decide whom to stop, question, and arrest, as well as whom to criminally prosecute, detain, or deport due to prior criminal history" (Macías-Rojas 18). Criminalization arises out of fear that is scapegoated onto undocumented migrants and the popularized stigma that these individuals are coming to the United States to commit "criminal" acts. Such notions follow the rhetoric perpetrated by Trump and the Republican party that aims to categorize a whole group of people as "criminal." Macías-Rojas says that these politically created "'moral panics,' or public anxiety over an issue, and fear of crime…lead to more punitive social control in order to 'evaluate, classify, and react' to those perceived to be a threat'" (20). Thus, the idea of undocumented migrants as "criminal" works in conjunction with legislative efforts to relieve U.S. citizens of feeling like they are being threatened by outside "invaders." While this "invasion" is anything but true, it reinforces dominant social narratives in the United States that are built out of white supremacy and an exclusionary historical trajectory.

The policing of undocumented migrants reveals how the United States has maneuvered its ability to regulate bodies within its geopolitical borders despite legislation like the Civil Rights Act. Macías-Rojas refers to this as the way "opponents of civil rights mobilized new issues (e.g.,

crime) to alter the playing field in a way favorable of their interests" (Macías-Rojas 21). In order for the government and conservative organizations to combat the threat of particular unauthorized Black and Brown bodies from escaping the eyes of the state, they moved to another form of control. These "perspectives on race, punishment, and democracy reframe policing and enforcement, taking it from a law-and-order issue to one of the most important racial-justice and civil-rights issues of our time" (21). Because the state took a different approach (i.e., prosecutorial immigration enforcement), it could subject racially inferior bodies through the criminal justice system without technically using race as a cause for criminality. Macías-Rojas argues that this reframing of the system "creates apparently race-blind distinctions between legitimate forms of state violence against 'criminal aliens' and illegitimate forms of violence against migrant 'crime victims' and 'vulnerable groups' deemed worthy of state protection" (22). The carceral approach to immigration enforcement creates a problematic and difficult situation because it roots itself in a constitutional framework that can avoid legal challenges.

The dramatic shift to prosecutorial immigration enforcement comes through several legislative efforts, including the passage of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), which reaffirms the legal maneuvers taken by the U.S. government. IIRIRA, introduced and enacted by a Republican Congress, streamlined the modes of criminalization, detention, and removal of undocumented migrants. Prior to IIRIRA, migrants who were previously convicted of an aggravated felony were primarily sought by immigration officials for detention and deportation. However, after the law took effect, criminal convictions were expanded to "include petty theft, DUIs, and minor drug offenses" (Macías-Rojas 61). This catastrophically changed who was deemed "deportable" because the previous aggravated felony provisions aimed to exclude those who were convicted of "murder, rape, or drug trafficking"

(61). The new law operated on a system that made it difficult for many migrants to cross into the United States due to such minor convictions and created a path for detention and deportation that could keep more people out. It also "instituted an expedited removal process that fast-tracked formal deportations without a hearing" by removing preceding "judicial review immigration hearings" (61). This overreach of power by the legislative branch greatly overshadowed the judicial branch's ability to provide due process for migrants, thus contributing to the rollback of civil rights among those deemed "unworthy" of protection by the United States.

Republicans who controlled Congress during 1996 used IIRIRA to legally criminalize, detain, and deport migrants who they desperately wanted to exclude. For those New Right legislatures, IIRIRA provided an opportunity "to regain or maintain political footing in the aftermath of the civil rights movement" under the guise of law-and-order (Macías-Rojas 62). Despite contestations from civil and immigrant rights groups, IIRIRA manipulated the judiciary by operating under a constitutional framework that targeted "criminals." Thus, the law did not overtly seem to break any of the rights outlined by the Constitution. The success of IIRIRA's passage resulted in more funding to border security efforts and migrant detention capabilities. At the law's inception, detention centers could hold more that 6,000 beds, but "By 1998, bed capacity had reached 16,000" (63). This growth in detention size was a direct result of IIRIRA and was furthered through "expanded expedited removal, which bypassed the immigration courts" (63). Creating a simplified chronological system of criminalization, detention, and deportation meant that the number of bed spaces needed to hold migrants needed to dramatically increase. IIRIRA signified a growth in the border security effort and Congress' desire to detain and remove individuals it did not want in the United States.

II. "Remain in Mexico"

Trump's "Remain in Mexico" policy was implemented on January 25, 2019, forcing asylum seekers to wait in Mexico until their immigration hearing. According to Latin America Working Group, more than 59,000 (im)migrants have been returned to Mexico as of the end of 2019. Instances of vulnerable populations such as LGBTQ+, children, disabled, and pregnant women are also among those returned.

A September 2019 article from *The Guardian* detailed one of these instances where U.S. Customs and Border Protection sent a pregnant migrant woman having contractions back to Mexico. According to the article, a "Salvadoran woman who was eight and a half months pregnant and experiencing contractions was apprehended…after crossing the Rio Grande" and taken "to the hospital, where doctors gave her medication to stop the contractions. And then, according to the woman and her lawyer, she was almost immediately sent back to Mexico" (Associated Press in Matamoros). Another case in Brownsville, Texas shows a 7 ½ month pregnant woman named Yulisa who fled Peru after receiving death threats from the father of her children. After being returned Yulisa said she "believes U.S. officials don't want these women to give birth in America, where the children would get automatic citizenship" (Leaños NPR). These examples illustrate how Latinas are victims of the harsh politics of immigration enforcement. Coupled with xenophobic and racial surveillance, it enacts violence through exclusionary power systems to the point of physically removing those who threaten to taint the privilege of obtaining U.S. American citizenship.

Rather than mere policing, the efforts of Border Patrol are enactments of state violence, because the agency uses its available resources and means to inflict inhumane deterrence strategies onto vulnerable migrant populations. As Reece Jones argues, the "official Border

Patrol strategy was to create conditions that would cause more migrants to die in hostile terrain, in order to deter other migrants from making the trip" (Jones 46).

The deaths at the U.S.-Mexico border are no accident; rather, they are deliberate attempts to harm the movement of civilians across political borders. In 2006, George W. Bush signed the Secure Fence Act, which granted the installation of fences for almost one-third of the U.S.-Mexico border. This aided in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's effort to block off border crossing areas with easy access and force migrants to journey through desolate terrains across New Mexico and Arizona. Deterrence strategies such as this have resulted in over "6,000 bodies recovered by Border Patrol…along the US-Mexico border" since the 1990s (Jones 45). The efforts to improve conditions at the border are not improving either, "[d]uring the US presidential nomination period in 2015, Donald Trump and most of the other Republican presidential candidates endorsed building a wall on the remaining section of the border" (37). As promised, Trump begun the process of adding sections of wall/fence to areas along the border, reducing my hope that the death number will decrease anytime soon.

III. Hernandez v. Mesa

As violence has grown at the U.S.-Mexico border, so have practices of enforcement. In 2010, Jesus Mesa Jr., an on-duty Border Patrol agent in El Paso, Texas, shot and killed 15-year-old Sergio Adrián Hernández Güereca. Mesa claimed that he felt his life was in danger when Hernández apparently began throwing rocks at him – so he used his gun to protect himself. The interesting thing about Hernández's case is that he was on the Mexican side of the border when Mesa fired and killed him. Jones notes that "[f]rom 2010 to 2015, US Border Patrol agents shot and killed thirty-three people" (43). This begs the question: what role is Border Patrol playing in

escalating the violence at the border? From the looks of it there seems to be an intensified notion of a shoot-to-kill mentality among law enforcement agents. In conjunction with the deployment of National Guard troops by Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump and Governors of Texas Rick Perry and Greg Abbott, the tendency for Border Patrol to act as a military force has shaped the way border violence continues to play out.

By the year 2020 "the [United States] homeland security industry will be worth an astounding $107.3 billion" (Jones 36). This incentive, along with the rhetoric surrounding migrants and the U.S.-Mexico border, will only increase Congress' initiatives to militarizes and prioritize Border Patrol and homeland security. Border Patrol already receives tactical gear, weapons, transportation vehicles, and drones from the military, as well as military style training which is changing the way agents act and react to situations at the border. Additionally, politicians like Trump and those in the Republican Party have characterized the border and those crossing it as invaders, while news outlets like "Fox News labeled stories at the US-Mexico border as 'America's Third War,' implying that the situation at the border was equivalent to the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan" (43). This shift in attitudes, strategies, and news coverage has only elevated the militarization of the border.

On February 25, 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Hernandez v. Mesa* that Border Patrol agents could not be sued for shooting foreign nationals. According to the Court, since Hernández was shot on the Mexican side, Mesa could not be held responsible; however, had Hernández been on the U.S. side things would be different. Hernández's death represents the dangers of this ongoing border militarization and the ability for the U.S. geopolitical border to act as a shield from responsibility and justice. As it remains today, immigration restrictions and enforcement "makes clear that the calculated management of life…was always designed to foster

only certain populations while other populations remained unfostered to the point of death" (Luibhéid xiii).

Conclusion

Racial and gender violence toward Mexican and Latinx immigrants reflect a broader history of white domination through immigration enforcement and exclusion. The construction of U.S. citizen identity today continues to foster certain populations as worthy of protection, while others are simply ignored or open targets. If we should take anything away from the Trump Era, it should be that the U.S. is far from being a "post-racial" society; rather, Trump's election exemplifies the ongoing overt, institutionalized, and systemic forms of racism interwoven in the fabric of this country. As I will discuss in chapter four, the election of Donald Trump was inevitable in a society that claims "color-blindness" and denies the existence of racism.

CHAPTER FOUR

COLOR-BLIND WHITE INDIVIDUALISM

Introduction

Despite popular discourse claiming that the issues of race are far behind us (i.e., the idea that most whites are "color-blind"), white nationalism and dominance are deeply ingrained in the United States' national imagination and nation building apparatus; thus, looking at racialized attacks like the 2019 El Paso Walmart shooting as "lone-wolf" or "isolated" incidents understates the systemic and institutionalized mechanisms of racial inequality still present today. While mainstream political responses to racially motivated attacks seem to denounce white nationalist visions, the state has yet to act on remedying such violence. Even in a time of great racial unrest and calls for racial justice, an end to police brutality, and the abolition of police and prisons, the state has not offered tangible solutions outside of reform, most of which actually give more funding to these violent institutions (Speri). However, it should not come as a surprise as I will discuss the risks associated with relying on color-blind narratives to save us from white supremacy. This logic, which utilizes the state as the great mediator, allows for the popularity of racism to continue including the election of Trump and the violent responses his rhetoric has provoked.

This chapter aims to discuss the limitations of color-blindness and how methods of "post-racism" allow white domination to persist. In addition, the destructive nature through which we focus on curing individual whites of their color-blindness comes at the expense of the collective responsibility of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). In the midst of the public protests demanding systemic change in the U.S. and the result of the 2020 presidential election, it

is also important to consider what the future of white nationalism and right-wing politics might look like.

Limits of Color-Blindness

The idea that racism is no longer a problem in the United States, or that we live in a "post-racial" society, has been a tool used by whites to explain the economic, social, and political inequality of non-whites. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues that "whites have developed powerful explanations – which have ultimately become justifications – for contemporary racial inequality that exculpate them from any responsibility for the status of people of color," which he labels "color-blind racism" (Bonilla-Silva 2). This justification, which is one manifestation of white supremacy, is used to place the burden on people of color in order to erase the violent history of subjugation, oppression, and deliberate enslavement that produced better outcomes for white Americans. It utilizes a rhetorical strategy in which these non-white populations are to blame for their plight because, according to whites, today every person has access to the same resources to be successful in this country. Thus, "whites rationalize minorities' contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and…cultural limitations" (2). In simpler terms, this language asserts that people of color need to stop blaming whites for their socioeconomic position in U.S. society. The problem with this color-blind language is that it does not dismantle institutionalized, systemic, and systematic forms of racial inequality and racialized violence. While the era of Jim Crow is over, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and people of color still suffer inequities in health care, socioeconomics, education, and a host of other issues. Black people are disproportionately incarcerated and subject to police killings. Indigenous people continue to fight to protect their lands and resources. Latinx communities have been

overly represented in COVID-19 cases and deaths (Sáenz and Garcia). What color-blindness attempts to solve is anything but real change for non-white communities and focuses primarily on protecting white fragility and comfortability. Thus, it is another form of whites escaping responsibility for their past, present, and future harms against every other community by rejecting that they have any accountability for the current inequitable conditions.

Color-blindness, at face value, operates under the guise of a system that purports to promote anti-discrimination and racial equality. Amy Elizabeth Ansell describes color-blindness as a logic that "captures a vision of a non-racial society wherein skin color is of no consequence for individual life chances or governmental policy" (Ansell 42). Yet, if we break this veil, what is revealed is a system (i.e., white domination) that is once again attempting to cover the tracks of its *de jure* past and allow for a more nuanced *de facto* operation. As Bonilla-Silva argues it, "this new ideology has become a formidable political tool for the maintenance of the racial order" (Bonilla-Silva 3). Revealing the true intentions of color-blindness show how its negation of the existence of racism, contributes to increased racialized attitudes because as movements for marginalized groups (e.g., Black Lives Matter) demand rights and changes, the dominant white group responds with the need for "LAW & ORDER" (@realDonaldTrump). The idea that law and order is needed to control groups of a supposed "post-racial" or "color-blind" society evokes the chilling history of this type of rhetoric.

Following the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, "It was no longer socially permissible for polite White people to say they opposed equal rights for Black Americans," so the inevitable argument for imposing law and order was based on Black criminality stereotypes (Schwartzapfel). If institutions and society at large could not *legally* uphold the racial order, they would use coded language like "color-blindness" to normalize the mechanisms of subordination

and control. Bonilla-Silva says, "color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-civil rights era. And the beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those it rewards" (Bonilla-Silva 4). Not only does color-blind logic base itself in the idea that racism does not exist, but it upholds a system in which social, economic, educational, political, etc. inequality is able to prevail. The inconvenient truth is that the United States utilizes color-blindness in service of white domination, allowing it to persist without having to overtly say so.

How White Dominance Persists

The changing dynamic of race is important in revealing how attitudes of white domination occur and persist. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic offer the concept of "differential racialization," describing the process by which the perception of racial and ethnic groups changes overtime. This is done when "the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs such as the labor market…for example, society may have had little use for blacks but much need for Mexican or Japanese agricultural workers" (Delgado and Stefancic 10). These racialized groups become pawns of elite and working-class whites to instill dominance in order to uphold ideas of white nationalism and exceptionalism. For example, prior to the September 11, 2001 events, Middle Eastern people were often portrayed in popular culture as "summoning genies from lamps," whereas after the events they emerged as "religiously crazed terrorists bent on destroying America and killing innocent citizens" (10). Attitudes toward minority groups as a whole continually change depending on the ways in which individual whites decide to categorize certain groups as

threatening or dangerous to the dominant social order. As time progresses, whites look for new bodies to Other and oppress in order to cling to their position of dominance.

As I have described in this chapter, ongoing white dominance is a result of the modern-day false idea that racism does not exist. The presumption that the United States is in a post-racial or post-Civil Rights era only fosters ideas "that racism is declining or that class is more important than race" today (Delgado and Stefancic 11). Contrary to this mainstream perception, Critical Race Theory (CRT) argues that race continues to play a significant role in the lives of middle- and upper-class minorities, the growing rates of incarcerated people of color, and the social well-being of non-white Americans. Race still has the ability to affect minorities who are "holders of high-echelon jobs, even judges…[e]ven highly placed black or Latino lawyers or executives may attract suspicion while riding a commuter train or upon arriving at their offices earlier than usual" (12). Regardless of the economic or social position that people of color inhabit, they are still viewed as a possible threat. And even though some people of color may hold higher positions in society, "chief executive officers, senators, surgeons, and university presidents are almost all white" (12). CRT aims to critique these displays of white power and subjection of BIPOC.

Today's socioeconomic inequalities still exacerbate differences between whites and BIPOC in the United States. For example, "[s]tudies show that blacks and Latinos who seek loans, apartments, or jobs are much more apt than similarly qualified whites to suffer rejections, often for vague or spurious reasons" (Delgado and Stefancic 12). White attitudes toward racialized bodies play into the unconscious bias that dominates how people of color are perceived in public and private spaces. The treatment of these bodies is further complicated through ongoing disparities as "[p]eople of color lead shorter lives, receive worse medical care,

complete fewer years of school, and occupy more menial jobs than do whites" (12). The process through which certain bodies become worthy of better treatment is seen in the production of ideal citizens, or those who can identify as white heteronormative individuals. Furthermore, ideal citizenship is only possible through the surveillance of spaces that people of color inhabit and are forced into. One of these racialized spaces arises out of racial bias in the criminal justice system, which is why "[t]he prison population is largely black and brown" (12). This history of criminalization and suppression because of racism, spatial regulation, and criminal stereotypes contributes to the continued relegation of BIPOC to inferiority. Given the history of white scholar domination in ethnic studies and law, scholars of color are using CRT to work against and critique systems of power and white domination that has allowed such exclusion and erasure to prevail. Further, most white allyship, scholarship, and activism focuses on the white individual and prevents any real change from occurring, because it solely focuses on individual change rather than the violence of the group as a whole. The lack of collective action on behalf of whites allows for segments of its population to tout anti-racist ideologies and support, while others defend and uphold white supremacy.

Holding White Individualism Accountable

Color-blind advocates, who claim to be anti-racist, root their support for the ideology in the fear that the opposite will lead to increased white nativism. For example, Conor Friedersdorf argues that the academic left's rejection of color-blindness "has failed to produce any alternative that is more coherent, more widely embraced, or more easily taught to children…[this] approach to race and identity seem to produce as much interracial animus and tension as understanding." Friedersdorf is correct that there has yet to be an alternative that proves effective against racism;

however, is there really only *one* approach to combating hundreds of years of white supremacy and domination? What he goes on to suggest is that we should be more afraid of the reaction that white Americans have when we point out their privilege, power, and the pain they have caused BIPOC people. That we should focus on curing the *individual* white person rather than the population/race as a whole. What Friedersdorf is referring to is the staunch U.S. American individualism that has allowed for Native genocide, Black enslavement, and decades of racial capitalism that have only benefited white America. Adia Harvey Wingfield offers a strong rebuke to this notion, contending that,

> Whites, by and large, enjoy the luxury of promoting the importance of the individual, because they benefit from living in a racially stratified society where whiteness is normalized. Racial minorities, by contrast, become aware from a young age that people will often judge them as members of their group, and treat them in accordance with the (usually negative) stereotypes attached to that group.

Whites have history, the law, and institutions on their side. They have been able to manipulate, fabricate, and stratify how BIPOC live, work, and operate in the United States. Through these processes, whites who "do not see" race, are scared to talk about race, or simply state that they "are not racist," "endorse [color-blindness] to ignore the ongoing processes that maintain racial stratification in schools, neighborhoods, health care, and other social institutions" (Harvey Wingfield). In other words, it is easier for whites to look past their history of violence and terror on BIPOC communities and simply say that it is time for us to "move on."

The alternative that Friedersdorf and others like him are seeking is a process that is careful to tiptoe around white fragility. As we critique systems of white domination and supremacy, we must also be attentive to the ways in which whites continue to construct their worldview and comfortability at the expense of non-whites. How much longer will BIPOC communities have to suffer before the dominant white population, allies and opposers alike, put

their privilege and comfort aside in the name of *true* equity?

Conclusion

In this moment of political strife and protest, it is important to recognize the significance of ethnic studies, social movements, and political struggles. Color-blind white dominance will persist if we are afraid to call out systems of power and oppression. We must be willing to speak up and speak out against those that hold us captive to histories of violence and destruction. As our ancestors have done again and again, we will prevail; however, like our ancestors we cannot be afraid to resist. Resistance looks like education, it looks like community, it looks like organizing and finding ways to build collective action. We continue to see the resilience of our BIPOC communities through the likes of mutual aid, political mobilization, and racial solidarity. In this moment, we have to keep asking questions, demanding action, and creating pathways toward a more just future.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to analyze how systems of white domination and racialized violence continue to have effects on Mexican American communities today. At the same time, it is important to consider how we can use our positions to make change. Many of us, ethnic studies scholars and community members, are asking ourselves what can *we* do? How can we stop our community from experiencing violence? The answer is not simple. We are living in a moment of dangerous attacks on BIPOC communities, including the likes of a Muslim ban, fears of a Latinx invasion at U.S. borders, and the white supremacist attacks on Jewish and African American places of worship. However, given the historical legacies and resilience of Mexican Americans and other BIPOC communities in the United States, we are called to stand up and critique the systems of power that continue to suppress our communities.

What I have sketched out in this study illustrates how history is repeating itself today. At the same time, I have sought to underscore how forms of resistance were always present. Further, the historical perspective provides insight to understand the importance of resistance in the present. This means we have to fight on multiple fronts. In order to combat such forces of inequality and suppression, we must challenge the dominant white narrative that is poisoning this country today. Through our scholarship we can change the current naturalized state of whiteness in academia and be critical of its root in colonialism, imperialism, and domination. We can say no to the Samuel Huntington's of today who claim that "There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society" and that "Mexican Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English" (45). We must defend ethnic studies because it is one of the spaces that *we* can speak up and resist. Defending ethnic studies allows us to dream

how *we* want and not according to white American visions. It is once again ethnic studies time to head this call to resist white domination.

People often ask, what are the next steps? Can we rely on the state to save us? How do we invest in alternative futures that are radically different from our current state? I argue that the possibilities for our communities are endless. Not only do we have to be willing to imagine, but we must also be wary of any state or political promises. If this study has demonstrated anything, it is that we live in a system that was created to function and serve only one group of people. However, our resistance over the centuries proves that we are capable of overcoming and prevailing. Envisioning alternative futures to white domination and supremacy that do not include the state is difficult, but we must be invested in the processes of education and community action that have guided movements in the past and present. Conversations like this one lead to critical examinations of the way that we live within this nation-state and how we can find opportunities of support and care for our communities.

Our alternative futures must also reckon with the violent histories that have destroyed and subjected BIPOC communities. They must not be afraid to critique the regime of white supremacy that enacts racialized violence on Black, Indigenous, and Brown bodies today. We must listen to community activists, scholars, and those directly impacted. I admit that this work will inevitably produce uncomfortable discussions on race, the U.S. as a nation-state, and particular painful histories for BIPOC and whites alike. I hope that this study is a point of learning and unlearning for every reader, and that it calls you to challenge control and be critical every day. For the white reader, I must ask you to not take what you learn here personally; rather, take it as an opportunity to use your position to critique systems of domination that you benefit from and reject processes of privilege that have led to other communities' destruction.

For the Black, Indigenous, Latinx, person of color reading this, I continue to stand in solidarity with you – remember why you are engaged in this work – the movement is just beginning.

APPENDIX

Figure 1. Keno Café walk-up window on the corner of N. Texas Blvd and Railroad St. – Weslaco, TX. Photograph was taken by Weslaco Economic Development Corporation.

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